

Community Comments Newsletter



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On both local and national levels we are witnessing a trend toward "dealing with our own problems" (on a national level it's called neo-isolationism). But there also seems to be a growing interest in sharing experiences; at our Land Reform workshop, folks as far away as North Carolina and California were able to share experience and enrich each others lives. In the same sense Community Service, Inc. has the potential to share cross-culturally in its relationship with Mitraniketan in India. Although we no longer are able, nor is it wise for us, to channel as large a contribution as we did in the past, we have an increasing interest in exchange, utilizing the educational potential, and developing a spiritual bond.

The school-community of Mitraniketan lies on 50 acres of land in the Trivandrum district of South India. It grows fruits, vegetables, rice and wheat for its own use and such cash crops as coconut, ginger, tapioca and bananas, and has a nursery. A poultry and dairy section have been forced to close temporarily because of the rising feed prices. Other work divisions of the community include printing press, carpentry, and crafts such as khadi spinning and weaving, leather work, embroidery, toy making, batik and fabric painting. There are about 180 students between the ages of two and a half through high school age, about one third of whom live in the community. Mitraniketan provides a community-centered education and an education-centered community life where each child can participate in the various work sections and develop his/her potential at many levels. These work sections also provide a large degree of self-support for the school.

The '72-'73 annual report describes a typical day at Mitraniketan:

"The Mitraniketan community generally is expected to wake up at five in the morning. After a silent prayer and attending to personal cleaning etc. the students and elders go for garden work. At 6:30 A.M. they are back in their rooms. At 7:00 A.M. the bell goes for breakfast. The school as well as all industrial sections start work with a common assembly in the auditorium at 8:00 A.M. Along with the children and the staff all the members of the community who live in the campus also attend the assembly. The formal school hours for day scholars is from 8:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M."

The Health Center, one of the outstanding aspects of Mitraniketan, provides health care and education for Mitraniketan children and the community also doing much extension work in the surrounding villages. Population control, sanitation and preventative medicine are heavily emphasized. Bela Banerjee, a Bengali public health nurse-midwife,

has worked there many years and receives some support from the Friends Medical Society in the United States. Dr. Jean Kohler, from the United States, returned to Mitraniketan this summer for her second stay after raising financial support through her area churches in Washington State. Because of better diet and medical care she reports that Mitraniketan children are taller and heavier than children in a nearby public school whom she studied, and population control resources have drastically reduced the birthrate.

Because of its bold attempts Mitraniketan has been able to attract outside support. Arthur Morgan encouraged Viswanathan to start Mitraniketan in the '50's and since Mitraniketan's inception in 1956, Community Service has continued to support it. Recently it has received support from others within India and from West Germany (Freedom From Hunger), Great Britain, Holland, and the Dr. Jean Kohler Fund, Bothell Methodist Church in Washington. In 1972 Community Service gave \$4,650, which accounted for one third of the contributions. In '73 we were only able to raise \$1,650. The recent irregularity of our support has made it rather difficult for their hand to mouth economy. Thus, we have decided to commit ourselves to sending at least the minimal amount of \$1,200 yearly. Your help will be appreciated in this endeavor.

Recent letters from Dr. Kohler, Viswan, Bela, and Ralph Keithan (an American living in India who has developed a rural university center and acts as a liason and advisor for Community Service and Mitraniketan) have brought the following news. After Dr. Kohler's arrival this summer, they were able to purchase a jeep, the first motorized transportation they had had in a while, enabling them to get materials for the shops, transport children for dental checkups, etc. A new rototiller has been a help in gardening and a refrigerator has enabled Dr. Kohler to begin an immunization program in the area. Viswan reported that the much needed irrigation project is well underway-land is being terraced and "bunds" (embankments) are being built to hold the water. When completed this system can help to double crop production. Thirty students and their professors from Puget Sound University have arrived and are spending a few months studying and living with the people in Mitraniketan. Bela is returning after a year in Rosulia where she helped set up a new rural health center.



The most compelling letter came from Dr. Kohler:

"We arrived without event here in Mitraniketan. Everyone was so thin it was shocking. Many were ill as their resistance was so down from the lack of food. For the first few days we had every bed in the hospital full and patients even on the floor but from contributions given to me while in the United States we were able to get enough drugs to get the patients all on their feet again. . . The children had no rice to eat when I arrived but we went out and were able to get a good rice ration and now all are well fed again. . . and now I'm getting some negative specimens with accompanying weight gains. . . every-one was suffering from malaria and we had nearly 100% fevers in all our patients. My son and I have just returned from pouring our precious kerosene on all the exposed ponds around here, and I am hoping the public health will give me more chloroquin as my own supplies are rapidly dwindling. . . The food situation is still serious with none of us getting enough calories per day for the work we're doing. . . Transportation strikes. . . caused more troubles. . . The cities were not affected so much, but no one really sees some pitiful things out here in the rural areas."

When one considers the goals toward which these people are striving and the odds they must overcome, it seems that each step must be painful. Not having the American-like character and experience for business management has also made things difficult. Ralph Keithan, who has helped them in budgeting, has been very concerned. In the past he has said that there was not enough involvement between the administrators and the people and between Mitraniketan and the neighboring communities. He has pointed to the ironic problem of outsiders who have come to help: they "had good ideas but did not know how to implement them effectively". And that Viswan had to "reconcile these rather impractical outside suggestions with the local situation." In his most recent letter he says that Mitraniketan:

". . . is coming out of its adolescent period and seems to be growing into a more firm maturity. However, it has a long way to go. It still fears to tackle the resources available in the Mitraniketan area, in Trivandrum and all of Kerala. Until that area can think of Mitraniketan as its own, I am convinced that we cannot go forward in any substantial way. There are many problems at Mitraniketan, but I think they are moving forward."

It is difficult to deal with a place of a different culture half way around the world. No one from Community Service has been to Mitraniketan for over five years and we are forced to communicate via letter. Mitraniketan is a unique education center in India (there are few similar rural oriented centers, particularly for children) trying to blend Eastern and Western ideas in a program of change. We want to support it in this effort without playing a paternalistic role. The initiative must always be Indian. We certainly have a valuable relationship to maintain, despite the difficulties and a unique opportunity to demonstrate international fellowship and share with their creative struggle.



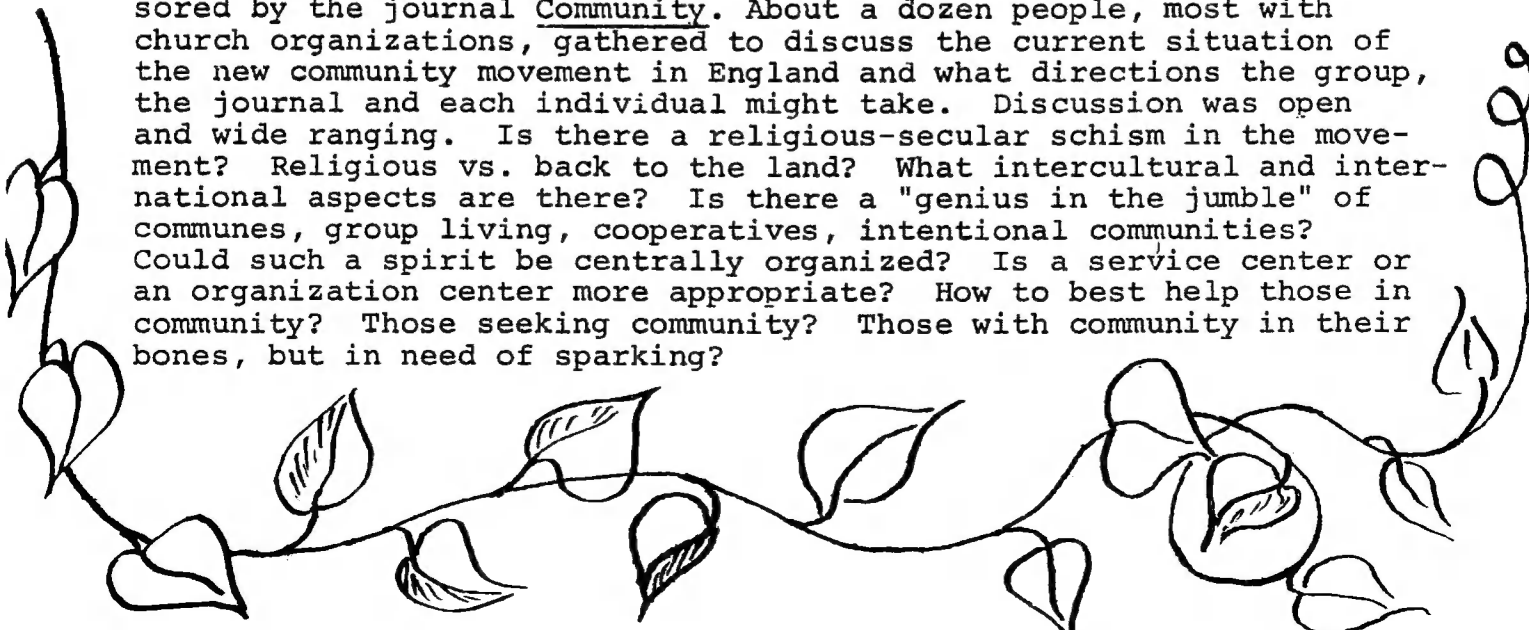
Visit To England

My trip to England this winter coincided with the first wave of energy crisis publicity. At that time coal miners and railroad engineers were on a "work to rule" slow down. The morning of the day I flew to London Edward Heath announced a three day week. What a time for a vacation! With crisis in the air I visited two intentional communities and met various people concerned in a broader way with community and cultural change.

My home before in southern England had been the Sheiling Schools, a Camphill school community for "handicapped" children located in Hampshire. I lived there four years ago taking part in the training course for "curative" teachers. The children have grown older and have new friends. My other friends have gone elsewhere for further training and now live as members in other Camphill movement communities. This left me as a bit of an outsider--a visitor. I watched the rehearsal by Sheilings community members of the Oberufer mystery plays. . . I saw, I "realized" the cultural stream of which the Camphill movement is a part. From my position as visitor I felt closest to the community during these presentations of the Paradise and Christian Nativity stories. I had acted a part in these ritualized plays translated from the verbal tradition of the Oberufer island in the Austrian Danube River. The plays have continued relatively unchanged since the 11th century, representing a sort of christian folk tradition. This tradition was what I found at the Sheilings four years ago--what I can call home.

I visited with Stan Windass of The Alternative Society in Oxfordshire for two days. As with so many projects The Alternative Society is headquartered in a garage behind the founder's home. Stan Windass initiated the formation of The Alternative Society over a year ago. Their program has centered on a series of week-end workshops in cultural alternatives, a two week summer crafts camp and a two week summer seminar "to consider the collapse of Western Civilization (sic) and to draw attention to the struggle for re-birth", and "to consider practical alternatives in education, industry, community and political organization." Now they plan to sponsor a Fellowship for an Alternative Society made up of about a dozen people, each concentrating on different areas of social alternatives. The fellows will gather monthly to share being and work. Britain is small enough that such a catalyst group is likely to have strong effect.

Through Stan I was invited to a "community consultation" sponsored by the journal Community. About a dozen people, most with church organizations, gathered to discuss the current situation of the new community movement in England and what directions the group, the journal and each individual might take. Discussion was open and wide ranging. Is there a religious-secular schism in the movement? Religious vs. back to the land? What intercultural and international aspects are there? Is there a "genius in the jumble" of communes, group living, cooperatives, intentional communities? Could such a spirit be centrally organized? Is a service center or an organization center more appropriate? How to best help those in community? Those seeking community? Those with community in their bones, but in need of sparking?



I felt a definite direction rising out of the consultation. "Community" is an identifiable movement in our Western cultures. It is moving in middle class circles because the "working class", at least in Britain, still has a community oriented structure. We can best serve this cultural movement by conveying the flavor of our experiences in community. Sharing experience and perceptions starts where you are. Politically, power centers are being by-passed through cultural changes so that those centers of force are no longer important.

Community journal can be contacted through David Clarke, West Hill College, Selly Oak, Birmingham, England.



We held a Land Reform weekend February 15-16 with 22 people participating. Yellow Springs residents joined people from the Center for Rural Studies in San Francisco; Andamule, Inc., (40 acres and a mule!) in Warrenton, N.C.; The Vale near Yellow Springs; Communitarian Village in Northern California; Twin Oaks and Macca-bee Farm communities in Virginia, and Farm Labor Organizing Coalition of northwest Ohio. We reviewed the land and environmental problems of towns like Yellow Springs as well as the economic circumstances within which urban and rural land is bought up by wealthy people and interests for security, speculative investment and profiteering control over natural resources. Among the projects reporting their work:

Andamule, Inc. is a farming project on the land where Soul City is being built and rented from Soul City. Their original plan was to use farms bought with grant money and slowly acquire more land with profits from agriculture. In that way an increasing number of sharecroppers could settle with a secure home and livelihood. Starting one year ago with only enough money for purchase of equipment, Andamule arranged for the temporary use of the Soul City fields. Presently planting 350 acres, they do not anticipate enough profit to carry through the land acquisition plan. However, the plans for Soul City do include some agriculture, so Andamule sees some future in its present spot.

Communitarian Village, representing another land tenure reform effort, is an association of communes trying to buy a piece of land large enough for them to build a village. The story of their frustrations in acquiring land is informative. A land title analyst who had offered his services in finding ownerless (free!) land disappeared. An 800 acre piece in Oregon which they had optioned would not be rezoned to permit light industrial use. Meanwhile, the future villagers are trying to establish industries to help finance their planned development. They make and market soyburgers and are considering a type composition business.

More complete notes and reports of both the business (Oct. '73) and land reform weekends are available on request from Community Service.

book review: Small Is Beautiful

E.F. Schumacher postulates that the premises underlying Western economics are antagonistic to man's health and well-being. From this point he roams with incisive perception and wisdom over vast areas of human endeavor in order to make his point; that Small Is Beautiful.

The treatment of natural resources as income instead of capital, the elevation of means over ends, the sacrifice of spiritual needs to material needs are seen as basic inadequacies in our economic system. The economist who is immersed in capital intensive growth and profitability as indices of success and paradigms for development in underdeveloped areas is singled out for attention by Dr. Schumacher for lack of appreciation of social and spiritual values. He emphasizes the folly of economic development that depends on continuous growth in the use of capital and minimizes human labor in areas of surplus human labor concurrent with the dehumanization of labor used in such a system. Schumacher argues the futility of seeking a foundation for peace rooted in universal prosperity fueled by greed, envy, and increasing consumption, which seem to cause violence.

Dr. Schumacher codifies his approach to an economics based on human needs and suited to the needs of developing countries under the heading, "Buddhist Economics". Synthesizing religious and spiritual values with technological progress, putting people before goods in the definition and function of work, utilizing technology that enhances a man's skill and power, and planning for full employment rather than the maximization of production are some principles of "Buddhist Economics". The standard of living would be measured in terms of simplicity, non-violence, and liberation. As Dr. Schumacher says, "Buddhist Economics is the systematic study of how to attain given ends with the minimum means." Self-sufficiency, conservation of natural resources, and maximized human satisfactions through the optimal pattern of consumption would be by-products of such a principle of accounting.

Dr. Schumacher has done a magnificent job in combining the physical and metaphysical aspects of living; of framing his critique within the perspective of the achievement of satisfaction, health, and well-being for all people on this planet. He employs the insights of the most brilliant and influential social reformers and critics, from Mao and Ghandi, to Commoner and Herber, to Galbraith and Tawney. He fuses fundamental problems of man like ecology and the alleviation of human misery with common sense and understanding, and provides us with a framework replete with examples, experience, and wisdom on how to understand and approach these problems.

Small Is Beautiful: A Study of Economics As If People Mattered by E.F. Schumacher can be ordered through Blond and Briggs, Ltd., 56 Doughty St., London W.C. 1, England. Price \$3.25.



good things



Central Clearing House, a non-profit environmental organization, has produced a 22 minute film documenting the effect strip-mining and coal fired electrical plants have had on the land and people of the Southwest. Portraying the social and spiritual effect of industrialization on the Hopi and Navajo Indians, the film "Look What We've

Done To This Land" urges that a national policy on energy and land use be established before irreparable damage is done. For rental or purchase: Central Clearing House, 338 East DeVargas St., Santa Fe, N.M. 87501.

Berea College in Berea, Kentucky, announces a workshop in Appalachian Studies, June 10-July 19, aimed at teachers and curriculum specialists in public schools who are interested in establishing courses in Appalachian culture and tradition in their local schools. The Appalachian mountains have been rich in fundamental values, in folk songs, hymns, folk tales, handicrafts and pioneer skills. The effect of this workshop may be the recognition of these strengths by an educational system which for the most part excludes them. For additional information: Workshop in Appalachian Studies, The Appalachian Center, Berea College Box 2336, Berea, Kentucky 40403.

We note in "The Peacemaker" the upcoming U.S. speaking tour of Danilo Dolci. Born in Italy he has spent most of his life working for social change through a new order of community development in Sicily to such an effective and inspiring degree that he is sometimes referred to as the "Ghandi of Italy". Dolci and his supporters recognize that society is made up of groups of people whose power is defined by the unity or division within them. One small group of people may be strong insofar as the rest of the community is weak and divided. Therefore, Dolci believes that in order for change to take place new democratic groups must be built. This is a difficult task in the communities of Sicily as the Sicilians are wary of all but immediate members of their families. Dolci's effect on their lives is a tribute to his commitment and perseverance. Write Joan Crowell, Friends of Danilo Dolci, 2251/2 E. 62nd St., N.Y., N.Y. 10021 for a schedule of the tour.

Something exciting is happening in Santa Cruz, Cal. The newly formed Wm. James Assoc. is seeking to put into action the ideas expressed in James' essay "A Moral Equivalent of War"; the idea that the only genuine alternative to war is some form of "work service" whereby we "go to war" in peacetime by setting ourselves to the arduous tasks of our society. How's that being done?

First they believe that we only change the larger problems of the nation by dealing with local communities. In Santa Cruz their particular concern is utilizing the untapped strengths of senior citizens, drop-outs and graduates of UCSC. A sampling of prospective projects; a 3 day work/study conf. drawing together UCSC people in a sort of coalition for action oriented community projects, a drawing together of older citizens aimed at 1) utilizing their skills and experiences in "classes" for younger people of the community. 2) developing "cottage industries" geared to creating a place of work for older persons. 3) where possible, creating living/housing situations bringing old and young together. 4) developing an apprenticeship program whereby younger folks interested in law or medicine could work and study with professional people thereby helping them to decide direction for their lives. 5) a program of continuing or adult education taught by retired academics, ex-academics or present academics in conjunction with the interest of small groups of individuals, and several other projects.

They have little money, of course, but are doing a newsletter and have a brochure that very specifically spells out their thinking, talking, and acting. We suggest you send a contribution for any materials you request. Wm. James Assoc., People's Bank Bldg. #8 1515 Pacific Ave., Santa Cruz, Cal. 95060.



Community Service, Inc.
Box 243
Yellow Springs, Ohio
45387

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